

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND STANDARDS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Inspector General Report on NOAA Weather Satellites

May 11, 2006

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Thank you Chairman Boehlert. I am pleased the Committee is holding this hearing today to examine such a critical issue.

The tragic scale of last year's hurricane season dramatically brought to light our Nation's vulnerability to natural disasters. Nobody will disagree that the devastation would have been even more extensive, and the recovery even more heart wrenching, if coastal communities had not had warning of what was coming and been able to evacuate many people from the hurricanes' paths -- a warning that was made possible by NOAA's polar orbiting weather satellites. These satellites provide data that are critical to NOAA's ability to provide accurate three- to seven-day forecasts of severe weather, including hurricanes. We desperately need the new satellites of the NPOESS program in order to allow even more accurate and more timely forecasts in the future -- forecasts that will save lives and livelihoods.

Unfortunately, the NPOESS program is deeply troubled and appears to be in real danger. Even after re-baselining the program in 2003, at a cost of an additional \$900 million and 10 months delay, the program continued to run off-course and over budget. Two years ago at the Environment, Technology and Standards Subcommittee hearing I held on this subject I was assured that the problems were being worked out. Seven months ago we found the problems had worsened, and had *not* been worked out. And here we are again, now billions over budget, with delays long enough that we are facing large potential gaps in life-saving satellite data. This cannot continue. We must make sure that we have the satellites we need when we need them, and effective management of the procurement and acquisition process is essential to meeting this goal.

The Department of Commerce Inspector General took a long, detailed look into the NPOESS program to help us better understand what went wrong and how to make sure that mistakes won't be repeated. I am anxious to hear how NOAA is incorporating the report's recommendations into its satellite program management process. The NPOESS program is incredibly complex with undeniable management challenges. I hope to learn today what concrete steps NOAA has taken to ensure that its experience with the NPOESS program, and recommendations from the IG report, will inform its actions as the Nunn-McCurdy process moves into the next phase. It is equally important that NOAA apply the "lessons learned" from the NPOESS program to their other major satellite acquisition program, GOES-R, which is entering a critical stage this year.

I look forward to a lively, informative discussion today. I want to thank our witnesses for being here, and I yield back the balance of my time.